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ABSTRACT

The Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools system, a large suburban school district, is in the process of developing a comprehensive teacher induction program for its new teachers. Training for new teachers takes place in the summer and after school, with teachers receiving a stipend for each 6-hour module completed. Feedback from teachers receiving this training has indicated that experienced teachers acting as consultants can help meet the needs of beginning teachers. The teacher consultants are selected by supervisors of instruction and then trained to work with three to five new teachers. Consultants and their trainees conduct several meetings together, where training objectives and needs are established. Tested at the elementary education level so far, the program appears to be successful. (CB)

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TEACHER CONSULTANTS - A MODEL FOR USING EXPERIENCED TEACHERS AS TRAINERS OF NEW TEACHERS

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Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools

INTRODUCTION

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is a large suburban school district located in the northern suburbs of Washington, D.C. The system serves 96,500 students in 155 schools managed through three geographic administrative areas. MCPS is the third largest school system of 24 in the state of Maryland and the eighteenth largest in the nation. It serves a 500 square-mile county in which 665,000 people reside. The school system has over 13,000 employees, including teachers, administrators, professionals, and supporting services staff. The student racial/ethnic mix is 67 percent white and 33 percent minority (comprised mostly of Black, Asian, and Hispanic cultures).

MCPS is currently faced with an increasing student population. Projections indicate that the current enrollment of 96,500 will increase to 120,442 by September, 1993. Elementary enrollment in kindergarten through the sixth grade is expected to increase by an unprecedented 38 percent by 1993 while secondary enrollments will climb 10 percent. A 40 percent increase in the birth rate, coupled with a housing boom have produced the demand for new school buildings, at least 16 of which will need to be built by 1993.

The school system has hired more than 300 teachers per year for the past three years. In April of 1985, the Montgomery County Board of Education created an advisory committee of county citizens known as the Commission on Excellence in Teaching. In its February, 1987, publication entitled Attracting, Keeping and Enabling Excellent Teachers, the commission made several significant projections and recommendations. One major projection was that 4300 new teachers would be hired to teach in MCPS by 1993. This was in keeping with projections at the state and national levels that as many as 75 percent of the teachers who will be teaching in the year 2000 are yet to be hired. This paper describes one component of MCPS' new teacher induction program, which is designed to meet immediate needs of new teachers currently in the system and to prepare to meet the needs of new teachers who will enter the system in the future.

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THE OVERALL NEW TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAM

MCPS is in the process of making its new teacher training program a comprehensive induction program designed to provide support at all levels (central office, area office, and local school). Currently, the majority of the training occurs at the central office level and is coordinated by the Department of Staff Development (DSD). Training for new teachers takes place in the summer (August) and after normal working hours during the school year. The format for training is six-hour modules, which occur in two three-hour or three two-hour training sessions. New teachers are paid a stipend for each six-hour module they complete. The major emphasis of the training is curricular in nature although some modules have been designed to address the system's priorities and initiatives. These include policies and procedures, higher order intellectual skills, and classroom management and organization. Of particular importance is the inclusion of instruction aimed at meeting the Board of Education's Priority 2: to implement programs that will result in substantial gains in the performance of minority students in the classroom and on standardized and criterion-referenced tests. MCPS employees design and teach the modules. The guideline for staffing is a ratio of 20 participants to each instructor; a popular concept has been to pair a content specialist with a classroom teacher to form an instructional team for an audience of 40-50 new teachers.

NEW TEACHER NEEDS

Feedback from teachers hired in FY87 indicates that more preparation is needed prior to the beginning of school. Many teachers feel that they struggle through the first several weeks of school, trying to learn the curriculum and apply it to the needs of their students at the same time that they are attempting to orient themselves to their new school, community, and lifestyle within the county. The feeling of being "behind" is expressed on many questionnaires and evaluation forms.

The issues for DSD are compounded by the fact that teachers new to Montgomery County fall into three distinct groupings: (a) those who are new to teaching altogether, (b) those who are new to MCPS but have teaching experience elsewhere, and (c) those contracted teachers with 5-12 certification who, due to decreased staffing needs at the secondary level, are faced with teaching a minimum of one year at the fifth or sixth grade level. Each of these groups has different training needs.

TEACHER CONSULTANTS

Input from new teachers in defining their needs led to the realization that, as good as the curricular training is, it does not meet all of the needs of new teachers. This group is immediately faced with a number of situations requiring skills in problem-solving. Initially, a six-hour module on problem-solving was considered; however, DSD staff were committed to finding a creative way to deliver the needed training in a more personal way. The decision was made to decentralize a module on problem-solving and to offer the substance of that training in small groups.

The literature on new teacher induction identifies at least nine ways in which experienced teachers can be used to support new teachers. The model developed by MCPS utilizes experienced teachers as trainers to deliver a decentralized training module on problem-solving. These trainers are referred to as teacher consultants.

The role description of teacher consultants developed by DSD is extensive and covers areas such as the following: long and short-term planning, classroom management and organization, MCPS' testing program, school system policies and procedures, instructional resources and strategies, grouping, differentiation, platform skills, and communicating with parents.

Currently, 254 new teachers are receiving training from 74 teacher consultants. This model for using experienced teachers is firmly anchored in principles of good staff development and sound fundamentals of adult learning theory.

SELECTION PROCEDURES

The selection of teacher consultants begins at the area office level. Supervisors of instruction confer with principals and other appropriate staff to formulate a list of teachers highly recommended to become teacher consultants. Each supervisor considers race and gender balance in making his/her recommendations.

Nominated teachers are contacted by DSD to determine their interest, availability, and grade level preference. Teachers who respond favorably are classified by grade level and geographic area within the county. The number of consultants actually employed is dependent upon the number of new teachers hired. The new teachers are assigned in groups of 3-5 to work with a teacher consultant. A master list of potential teacher consultants is maintained by DSD and new consultants are hired as dictated by the number of new teachers contracted after the beginning of the school year.

Several curriculum specialists, who know the curriculum at all grade levels K-6, are retained to consult with groups where necessarily mismatches occur. For example, if three new teachers are hired in September - one at the kindergarten level, one at the second grade level, and one at the sixth grade level - a curriculum specialist is assigned to this group. The same is true for some consultants who have a thorough knowledge of either early childhood (K-2) or upper elementary curricula. These consultants can work comfortably in a situation where their trainees are employed at more than a single grade level.

The Department of Staff Development makes the selections of the K-6 regular classroom consultants. The selection of consultants in more specialized areas such as speech pathology, aesthetic education, physical education, or special education is assigned to the appropriate director or supervisor. Once selected, however, all teacher consultants are accountable to the Department of Staff Development. Items such as meeting agendas, rosters, pay vouchers, and evaluations are handled by DSD.

To date, no teacher consultants have been used at the secondary level because population patterns within the county have been such that very few secondary teachers have been hired, nor will there be any appreciable number until 1993. For those few secondary teachers who are employed, the existence of departmental "resource" teachers and specialists at the area and central office provides sources of help to meet their needs.

TRAINING FOR TEACHER CONSULTANTS

The primary objective of DSD is to give each consultant work group a minimum of one six-hour module together before the teachers begin the school year. Prior to meeting with their trainees, however, the consultants receive one day of training themselves. During this time, they are familiarized with the background of the consultant program, the selection procedure, nationwide induction trends, the Maryland State Department of Education's exemplary initiative (Montgomery County is one of five participating counties in the state), a review of adult learning theory and the characteristics of adult learners, and principles of good staff development. The point is stressed that, as consultants, they are now staff developers.

During the afternoon of their day's training, the consultants get were in groups by grade level to formulate ideas for some generic lesson plans which new teachers can modify and personalize for actual use during the first week or two of school. Anticipated training problems and how to deal with them are also discussed throughout this day of training. Consultants meet and informally converse with their trainees before they begin working together formally.

CONSULTANT/TRAINEE SESSIONS

Several days after they are trained, the consultants meet for a full day with their trainees. The role description generated by DSD provides the parameters within which they will work. The emphasis for this day is on planning - each new teacher is asked to design at least one week's worth of lesson plans to start the school year. The consultant guides the planning, offers suggestions, explores alternatives, and provides insights and experience as the various sets of plans are drafted. Materials and supplies are provided for each group in order to facilitate this objective and to initiate the trainees into hands-on learning experiences.

Following this inital meeting, the consultant is responsible for meeting with his/her group for a minimum of six hours each semester: this precludes the many phone calls and communication via the school's in-house mail system. Some small groups combine during these followups to achieve the maximum benefits of the consultants' skills. The consultants arrange the meetings and send agendas to DSD so that they can be monitored. Agendas for each two or three-hour session are needs assessment-based: agenda items are supplied to the consultants by their trainees

EVALUATION

The consultants (and the session, in general) are evaluated by trainees at the conclusion of the pre-school module and following each meeting thereafter through an instrument developed by the DSD. In early November and again at the end of the school year, the consultants are asked to evaluate the program and make suggestions for improvement. The trainees evaluate the program at the conclusion of work with their consultant. Some program adjustments have already been made on the basis of feedback.

HOW THE PROGRAM BENEFITS MCPS

MCPS benefits from this program in a variety of ways. The program has proven to be a reward system for many mid-career teachers, both monetarily and in terms of professional esteem. The program is personalized training which stems from the grass roots needs. Many consultants have reported that (a) they picked up some great ideas from the new teachers, and (b) the energy of the new teachers had given them another boost of excitement as they approached another year of teaching. The small-group design provides opportunities for support and networking unavailable in some of the other programs where veteran teachers assist in the induction of new teachers. The consultant program puts the very best teachers, by grade level, in positions of primary importance in the development of new teachers. DSD has profited from this because it has derived an expanded group of experienced teacher trainers who can now be utilized both in other areas of staff development efforts and in future years as the numbers of new teachers increases. Finally, as the program models adult learning theory, teachers who were exemplary teachers of children are now exemplary trainers of adults. All of this has been done in a manner which has been affordable, manageable, and resourceful.